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HOUSE PASSES APPROPRIATIONS BILL TO MAKE VITAL INVESTMENTS IN AMERICAN AGRICULTURE AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Seventh District Congressman Dave Obey (D-WI) said today that the Agriculture Appropriations bill, which the House of Representatives approved last night, makes vital investments in American agriculture and rural communities and includes a number of provisions that are especially important to Wisconsin.

“Over the last six years, the Administration has repeatedly failed to make the investments that rural America needs to create better lives for farm families and others who depend on a thriving agricultural economy. This bill begins to address that deficit,” said Obey, the Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee. “For example, a recent report by USDA’s Economic Research Service found that almost one out of every three households in rural America failed to meet minimum standards for basic amenities, such as plumbing and necessary bathroom and kitchen facilities. That is simply unacceptable for America in the 21st century, yet the President’s budget actually proposed another cut for the programs that help rural families and communities. On a bi-partisan basis, we rejected those cuts and invested instead in rural housing, in rural community sewer and water, and in rural business development programs.”

The bill invests in a number of programs that are vital to combating the spread of animal and

plant diseases throughout Wisconsin and the United States, Obey said. Among these are:

- \$1.98 million that Obey requested to assist with development of Wisconsin's nationally-recognized animal ID program to provide for a 48-hour traceback capability to identify the source of an animal product disease outbreak such as Mad Cow and foot and mouth. Wisconsin's premises registration program has been declared the model for the nation by USDA with nearly 60,000 premises registered;
- \$16.7 million that Obey requested to combat Chronic Wasting Disease among wild and captive deer, including \$1.732 million for Wisconsin, which will help the State deal with the costs associated with hunting, testing and disposal of affected animals;
- \$5.6 million for the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to track and contain the outbreak of Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia, a devastating disease that has been found in a wide variety of fish throughout the Great Lakes. With 360 commercial fish farms in Wisconsin worth \$12 million and a \$2.3 billion sportsfishing industry in the State, it is vital to get a handle on this terrible disease.

Other Wisconsin priorities that the House approved funding for include:

- \$2.475 million that Obey requested to help establish a program at the University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point to train students in the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and spatial analysis techniques. Both local government and private industry are increasingly seeking GIS professionals and the center will serve both traditional students and professionals seeking to achieve a level of proficiency through a short course of classes rather than returning to school for a new degree;
- \$1.039 million that Obey requested for the management and monitoring of the grey wolf population in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan to determine the impact upon wolves and livestock of the recent decision to delist the grey wolf from the endangered species act. The successful reintroduction of wolves into Wisconsin, now numbering around 540-600 animals, has brought with it the need for wolf management, especially in areas of livestock production. Until very recently, grey wolves in Wisconsin have been protected by the Endangered Species Act which prohibits killing or harming them except under very specific circumstances. This funding helps the Wisconsin DNR trap and remove problem wolves and assist in the wolf management of the nearly 4,000 wolf population throughout the 3 states.

- \$948,000 that Obey requested for the Wisconsin Grazing Lands Initiative. Many small dairy farmers have found that they can be more efficient and profitable by adopting low-input and sustainable farming practices, but their success often depends on getting specialist help, including technical assistance and continuing education. The Wisconsin Grazing Lands Initiative provides that help for Wisconsin dairy farmers;

- \$495,000 that Obey requested to support an extension education and outreach program at the Red Cliff Cold Climate fish hatchery. The State of Wisconsin has made a significant investment of \$3 million in the facility which aims to address the unique needs of cold water fish farms and hatcheries in northern Wisconsin and neighboring states through on-farm consultation, regional training programs and education materials and publications, helping farmers overcome the steep learning curve associated with production practices and management of northern aquaculture;

- \$396,000 that Obey requested for the Potato Pest Management program, a collaboration of the Wisconsin Potato and Vegetable Growers, the UW-Madison and the World Wildlife Fund to develop integrated pest management approaches that will reduce dependency on pesticide use in the production of potatoes and vegetables. Funding for this 10-year collaboration has resulted in the accelerated adoption of biological Integrated Pest Management (IPM) systems, reduced reliance on toxic pesticides and helped grow potatoes to meet stringent ecologically-sound standards. On June 13, 2003, the US Department of Agriculture recognized the program for its outstanding work, giving it the Secretary's Honor Award for maintaining and enhancing the national natural resources and environment;

- \$248,000 that Obey requested for a technology transfer program at the University of Wisconsin – Stout. For more than 10 years, funding through USDA has enabled UW-Stout and the North West Manufacturing Outreach Center to provide technical assistance to help improve efficiency at over a thousand small manufacturing businesses throughout northern and central Wisconsin. Those efforts have created or saved more than 2,350 manufacturing jobs and have had an economic impact estimated at \$185 million.

The bill also includes important new initiatives in the areas of nutrition, food safety, and renewable fuels and maintains needed investments in research and conservation, Obey added.

However, the Agriculture Appropriations measure must still be approved by the Senate and signed by the President before it becomes law, Obey concluded. “But having these funds included in the House approved version means a major hurdle has been cleared.”

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